

Conservatoires UK

Strategic Plan 2024 -2029

This strategic plan sets out the aims and objectives of Conservatoires UK (CUK) for the period 2024-2029.

CUK is the representative body for the UK's leading conservatoires in the performing arts. It currently comprises a membership of eleven higher education institutions that deliver specialist performing arts education throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

The Contemporary Conservatoire

UK conservatoires are internationally recognised as global centres of excellence in specialist education and training in the performing arts. Currently c. 10, 270 full-time undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research students study at CUK member institutions, drawn from the UK and over 50 different countries around the world. In addition, CUK institutions support more than 130,350 young people and 327,592 members of the public each year through their extensive school age and community engagement programmes. The work of CUK at all levels is underpinned by a strong commitment to the principles of access and participation, equity, diversity and inclusion, reflecting multi-dimensional capacities for societal engagement through the performing arts that deliver significant public value and impact.

Defining features of a CUK conservatoire include:

- A highly vocational portfolio of research-led higher education programmes in the performing arts, situated in a proto-professional learning environment with a collaborative culture that nurtures creativity and entrepreneurship.
- A primary focus on intensive learning and teaching methods, involving high student/staff contact hours and a curriculum with a demanding rehearsal and production schedule commensurate with that of the performing arts professions.
- An emphasis on one-to-one and small ensemble/small group tuition, with frequent opportunities for students to work with visiting artists, pedagogues and researchers of international standing across a range of artistic genres and repertoires.
- An assessment model that supports and promotes the development of high-level practice-based skills in the performing arts.

- A research culture across theory and practice that informs, supports and enriches learning, teaching and performance at all levels and produces research and knowledge exchange outputs of public value and national and international standing.
- Extensive pre-tertiary provision, typically a large-scale Junior Conservatoire or equivalent, providing a breadth of opportunity for the development of artistic practitioners from earliest school years through to postgraduate education and on into the performing arts professions.
- A strong commitment to access and participation and equity, diversity and inclusion, reaching out through an extensive portfolio of freely available programmes of activities to engage people of all ages and backgrounds with the performing arts.
- Strong links and collaborative engagement with the performing arts professions, leading to exceptional employability rates regionally, nationally and internationally.

Our Context

Conservatoires play a vital role in the education and training of students for careers in the performing arts and are rightly proud of the public value of their work, especially their socio-cultural and economic impact. The UK had an estimated 2.29m creative industries jobs in the year to September 2021 and accounted for 6.9 per cent of all UK¹. The performing arts and culture industry was responsible for:

- £21.2bn in direct turnover
- £10.8bn in Gross Value Added (GVA), with £8.6bn of this generated by the market segment of the industry and the remaining £2.2bn contributed by the non-market organisations

When indirect and induced effects are also added in, the arts and culture industry is estimated to have supported £48bn in turnover, £23bn in GVA, 363,713 jobs and £13.4bn in employee compensation².

The arts and culture sector has an important benefit on health and well-being. Those who had attended a cultural place or event in the preceding 12 months were 60 per cent more likely to report good health, and theatre-goers were 25 per cent more likely to report being in health than the average. People valued being in the audience for the arts at about £2,000 per year, which is higher than sport.³

¹ Economic Estimates series released by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

² CEBR/Arts Council England report, April 2019

³ The Contribution of the Arts and Culture to the National Economy, Arts Council of England; , Arts Council of England. *The Value of Arts and Culture to the People and Society*

The membership of CUK currently comprises:

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Leeds Conservatoire

London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

Royal Academy of Music

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Royal College of Music

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Royal Northern College of Music

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Our Vision

CUK will empower and support its members and their constituencies to develop the resilience and knowledge needed to flourish in an increasingly challenging and complex landscape for the performing arts.

Our Mission

Over the next 5 years, CUK will support its members by:

- Being the collective voice of the UK's leading conservatoires in the performing arts.
- Ensuring that the interests of the UK's leading conservatoires are represented across the wider Higher Education sector and within UUK, GuildHE and other relevant bodies.
- Positioning the UK's conservatoires as world-leaders across the performing arts disciplines.
- Playing a leading role in shaping the performing arts professions of the future._

Our Aims and Objectives

Aim 1: Advocating for the conservatoire model of performing arts education by:

- Lobbying for the UK's conservatoire sector on key policy issues that affect its future resilience and aspirations, both independently and in partnership with stakeholder groups.
 - Promoting the public value and impact of the UK's conservatoires on performing arts education, the performing arts professions and the wider cultural life, health and well-being of society.
 - Commissioning targeted research and project-based activities to inform and support advocacy work.
 - Delivering meaningful innovation and knowledge exchange interventions for the benefit of the performing arts sector and society.
 - Ensuring the student experience remains at the heart of advocacy work and decision-making.
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Aim 2: Taking a global leadership role to share best practice by:

- Drawing on the specialist expertise of the CUK Board, CUK Forums and CUK Student Network to identify and develop initiatives that can be developed and promoted across the wider membership via CUK's biennial conferences and collaboration with other membership organisations in the UK and overseas.
- Positioning performing arts education and training as a lifelong continuum of progression from early years through to the professions.
- Ensuring conservatoires play an active part in identifying ways to address the broader societal issues facing the performing arts professions, including environmental sustainability, technology/AI etc.
- Identifying mechanisms to ensure the future relevance of the performing arts professions.
- Promoting access and participation and the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in a conservatoire environment and the performing arts professions.
- Leading by example through instilling a healthy, safe and positive working culture across the conservatoire sector that can feed into the performing arts professions.

- Championing the value of conservatoire-led research and innovation to the performing arts sector and wider society.
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Aim 3: Embedding a culture of continuing professional development throughout the CUK network, including:

- Harnessing the energy and specialist expertise of the CUK Fora, CUK Student Network and CUK biennial and thematic conferences as vehicles to develop and support staff across the membership.
- Seeking informal opportunities to develop and share best practice between CUK members through targeted activities on a bilateral and/or multilateral basis.
- Engaging proactively with relevant regional, national and international organisations and networks in the interests of collaborating on professional development.
- Engaging proactively with the CUK Student Network to further enhance the student experience by instilling a culture of lifelong learning and professional development.

Our Fora

The CUK Board is supported by a number of designated Fora, each of which brings together colleagues from across the wider membership in the interests of supporting the work of the organisation. The Fora – a number of which have student representatives- are Chaired by a member of the CUK Board, and function as specialist working groups; taking devolved responsibility for specific pieces of work at the request of the Board and identifying where targeted interventions would be timely and appropriate. They facilitate in-depth discussion on topics of direct relevance to the wider membership and are empowered to propose collaborative activities of benefit to the CUK community, such as commissioning research, developing joint bids, reaching out to guest speakers etc.

Forum Chairs are responsible for ensuring effective communication with the Board and presenting and speaking to the minutes of Forum meetings. Whereas CUK does not have over-arching Key Performance Indicators per se, the Fora play a major role in ensuring that the aims of the CUK Strategic Plan are met and specific targets and deadlines set where appropriate. The work of the Fora is overseen and monitored by the CUK Board.

From time to time, specific needs arise outside the remit of the CUK Forums that warrant the formation of time-limited 'task and finish' groups. When this occurs, the CUK Board discusses and agrees the most appropriate and measured approach to be taken before assigning the work to relevant colleagues to be taken forward.

Our Conferences

CUK convenes biennial 2 day conferences, bringing together colleagues from across the membership for in-depth discussions on specific topics/themes of relevance to the sector. Guest speakers are invited to participate in these events, as are representatives from the CUK Student Network (see below). Hosted by member institutions in rotation, these events provide an invaluable opportunity for colleagues to interact in the interests of developing and sharing best practice, as well as gaining direct insight into the work of the host organisation and its staff and students. Additional targeted workshops/conferences are convened as appropriate.

Our External Relationships

Universities UK (UUK) and CUK employ a shared Policy Researcher, who supports the partnership between CUK and UUK's Specialist Institutions' Forum. The postholder provides strategic guidance to CUK members on wider policy developments affecting the Higher Education Sector, and access to expertise in UUK's policy and communications teams to leverage targeted analysis and specialist advice. This joint role has the reciprocal benefit of ensuring that CUK's interests are represented and aligned with wider UUK policy, advocacy and stakeholder engagement work.

In addition to enjoying a close working relationship with UUK, CUK connects with conservatoire networks in the EU and US, and a wide range of membership bodies and professional performing arts organisations across the UK and internationally. These relationships are fundamental to ensure that CUK's voice is heard and to foster mutually beneficial collaborations.

As CUK builds on its advocacy and lobbying work over the five years of this Strategic Plan, the expectation is that its portfolio of external relationships will expand in a targeted way in response to the priorities that emerge.

Our Student Network

The CUK Student Network comprises the Students' Union Presidents (or equivalent elected representatives) from the eleven member institutions, and is Chaired by a former CUK SU President, elected annually from within its own membership. As well as providing an important peer support group for CUK's SU Presidents, the Network undertakes bespoke student-facing initiatives on behalf of CUK as a whole, acting as a conduit between the Board and students across the organisation.

The CUK Student Network Chair prepares a report for each Board meeting and attends the summer meeting to present this in person. They maintain regular - normally fortnightly - contact with the CUK Chair and Policy Advisor, raising any issues emerging across the

Network for the attention of the Board, and are approached to act in an advisory capacity as and when necessary. The Network meets termly in an informal conference setting, helps facilitate communication between CUK and the wider student body and works closely together in the interests of mutual learning and support.

Our Responsibilities as a Charity

CUK conducts its business in compliance with the expectations placed on it as a company limited by guarantee without share capital. This includes the operation of its Board of Directors and ensuring that its annual financial reporting mechanisms comply with relevant Charity Commission and Companies House requirements.

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